

MRSA: Information for State Agencies

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, a form of staph infection that does not respond to routine treatment with some commonly used antibiotics, although other antibiotics are effective. MRSA is becoming increasingly prevalent in community settings. Public attention surrounding MRSA underscores the need for raising awareness and preventing infection, especially in community settings such as businesses and offices. Should employee concerns over MRSA occur the following guidance may be helpful (note: healthcare settings, such as physicians' offices, may have additional requirements). Employees may also contact their local health district for further guidance.

Background

Staph infections have been around for a long time, causing mild to severe illness. MRSA may be more difficult to treat but is otherwise generally the same as a "staph infection." Mild infections may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

MRSA outbreaks in community settings do occur. However, outbreaks typically occur among those having poor hygiene, sharing contaminated personal items or athletic equipment (e.g., sports teams), with skin-to-skin contact (e.g., family members, sexual partners), or with cuts or breaks in the skin occur.

Colonization

While 25-30% of the population is colonized with staph, approximately 1% is colonized with MRSA. Colonization means the organism is carried on the body, either in the nose or on the skin, but is not causing any symptoms or infection. As a result, an employee or customer/client could be a carrier, but not be aware of it. These individuals may spread the organism to others who could go on to develop infections.

Conditions for the Spread of Bacteria

Staph, including MRSA, are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with a shared, contaminated item. In some settings, where individuals share towels, personal hygiene items, or athletic equipment, or where individuals are engaged in close-contact (e.g., sports teams) staph could be transmitted. Risk factors for transmission of MRSA include crowding, frequent skin-to-skin contact, cuts or breaks in the skin, contaminated surfaces and shared items, poor hygiene, immune system problems, and recent surgery or other invasive procedure.

Basic Steps for Prevention

- Practice good hand hygiene and encourage staff to routinely wash hands with soap and water.
 - Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (alcohol content $\geq 60\%$) is also effective at killing staph.

- Keep wounds or cuts covered with a clean, dry bandage until healed.
- Discourage sharing of personal items (e.g., razors, nail files, towels).
- Routine cleaning with detergent- or bleach-based cleaners is recommended for disinfection. It is important to read the instruction labels on all cleaners to make sure they are used safely and appropriately. It is NOT necessary to close or 'disinfect' facilities or offices because of a MRSA infection in an employee or customer/client. Because the bacteria live on the skin, they may be reintroduced back into any environment at any time. Therefore, hand washing and wound care remain the primary means of preventing staph infections.
- Individuals infected with MRSA should NOT report this to their supervisors, unless the condition interferes with job duties or wound drainage cannot be contained by a bandage. Policies should be developed to ensure the appropriate management of this information to adequately protect the privacy of employees.
- It is not necessary to inform other personnel regarding an employee with a MRSA infection.
- Follow your sick leave policy. Unless directed by a physician, individuals with MRSA infections do not need to be excluded from work, as long as wound drainage can be contained by a bandage. Exclusion may be considered for those with wound drainage that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage and for those who cannot maintain good personal hygiene.

Public Health Reporting

Suspected outbreaks of staph infections should be reported to the local health department (see <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/lhd/>). Health department staff may be able to provide additional guidance in identifying causes of transmission, and recommendations for reducing the risk to staff.

Resources

Further information about MRSA can be found on the website links listed below:

- Virginia Department of Health (<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov>)
- [MSRA fact sheet](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov>)